UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN DIEGO

Hybridizing Music in Juxtaposition and Paradox: Emerging Sub-genre through Gamelan Math-metal

A Thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements
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by

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The Thesis of Iputu Tangkas Adi Hiranmayena is approved and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically:

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Chair

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DEDICATION

To my family:
regardless of blood, let us find the beauty in darkness

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

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Master of Arts in Music

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Professor Nancy Guy, Chair

This thesis discusses formations of sub-communities through hybridity involving Balinese gamelan and metal music. Established in 2011, Sanggar Manik Galih located in Bangah, Bali witnessed the creation of multiple new musical ensembles. Founded by I Made Lasmawan and Ni Ketut Marni, Manik Galih extends its practice to the United

States and the United Kingdom through diaspora and transnationalism. I look at the sub-genres, gamelan baleganjur and math-metal in isolation, as they both involve ideas of dark culture (evil spirits, negative space, ritual) as inspiration for composition. I use gamelan math-metal band Niskala, which was one of the new ensembles created in 2011 in the Sanggar Manik Galih, as a case study to highlight the musical sensibilities chosen by the band to create a sub-community. Based in Manchester, England, Niskala represents a combination of musics that at first appear to derive from opposing ideologies. Although their music encompasses a similar sonic palette, the philosophical foundation are divergent: gamelan baleganjur works to ward off evil while metal embraces it. An analysis of Niskala's first extended play album titled *Panak*, extracts the techniques in both musics and demonstrates ideas of juxtaposition and paradox, which are central in both math-metal and gamelan baleganjur. There are multiple sub-genres of metal and it is not uncommon for the practitioners of this sub-genre to combine ideas that project opposing and comedic products. I use Neriko Doerr's idea of "learning through laughter" to frame my study of juxtaposition in musical hybridity since laughter has been essential in the process of exposing gamelan math-metal to a larger audience. In doing so, I hope to re-think musical appropriation in contexts of developing musical tropes.

Chapter I: Introduction

1.1 Between Metal and Gamelan Baleganjur

This thesis is partly an analytical deconstruction of sound and partly an attempt to theorize the emergence of sub-communities and sub-genres in hybrid music. The subject of this study arose out of my fascination with combining artistic processes and creative music, (i.e. music that finds new definition in performance) with my own philosophies. The musical material in which I am interested envelops notions of juxtaposition and paradox, including the musical collaboration of opposing ideas and the process of finding beauty in darkness. In this thesis, I frequently discuss the idea of darkness, as it is central to the juxtaposition in gamelan and metal cultures. I define darkness not as a lack of spiritual enlightenment or intellect but rather as that which people see as frightening and grotesque; it is the process and product we tend to discard. I take as my primary subject the music of the gamelan math-metal band Niskala to highlight hybrid musical sensibilities and to discuss the necessity of challenging symbolic ideologies within metal and gamelan. With this case study, I discuss what it means to hybridize musical art forms within established musical communities. It warrants the combination of tradition and innovation as a locus for creative practice. As Marc Perlman says, "One of the most frequently remarked devices of creativity is the combination of two or more existing things to form a new one" (Perlman 2004: 28). The emergence of new communities around these hybrid forms helps to reframe the valuation of artistic practices and, in turn, to re-imagine the tendency to promote biases against certain genres, in this case heavy metal and gamelan baleganjur. This is not a critique of current cultural frameworks, but

more resurgence of associative symbolism that works against “umbrella” genres such as metal and gamelan.

I use the concept of “learning through laughter” proposed by Neriko Doerr as a means to explore the impulsive reaction to laugh at a hybrid music before realizing its function or importance. In particular, the tendency to hybridize ideas within the metal genre combines diverse, artistic factions as a natural phenomenon that occurs in creating agency for artists looking to combine seemingly unrelated music. In this case, Niskala combines gamelan and math-metal as mode of commodity: they are the only ones calling their genre, gamelan math-metal. For this reason, Niskala stands out. The process of generating new music within the metal genre continuously combines ideas of paradox with serious intentions of virtuosity. The fast tapping of lead guitars over the calmness of reggae “one-drops” (a leisurely rhythmic technique in reggae music that emphasizes the first beat of a measure), for example, only skims the surface of musical ambiguity. Included in metal’s grandiose projection of virtuosic showmanship is the idea of presenting performances as “epic” or bigger than the last band. For metal bands, this constitutes a search for an “other” facet to combine with their already established sensibilities. My interest in this arose from my constant encounter with people laughing whenever I exposed them to aggressive bands that I enjoy listening to. This may be a projection of how people perceived my persona, but surely that cannot be the only reason. There was something about the music and performativity that they deemed to be comedic; it made them uncomfortable. The interaction between my friends and the music I was “subjecting” them to implanted an idea about metal and gamelan culture that

seemed to make laughter the pinnacle of discovery; they understood the connection of musical techniques to dark ideology.

In analyzing the music of *Niskala*, I work with the notion that the sub-genre of gamelan math metal combines the techniques used in both arts as part of a process in creating a sub-community. This new group takes apart specific musical devices and combines them strategically to create their own sound. This diminishes neither art form nor renders them incomplete; they work together both tangibly and abstractly. Many artists are inspired and utilize gamelan in their music, but they often discard rhythmic configurations and elasticity of time, both of which are important components in Balinese gamelan music. There are countless groups that utilize gamelan's spatial and timbral components to evoke mystery or create an eerie sonority, but few that utilize its rhythmic techniques. *Niskala* discovers the intimate energy of interlocking rhythms and uses it as a foundation to their music. *Niskala's* first extended play album comprises three tracks titled "Kekawa," "Sarebi," and "Kelem," which I analyze in Chapter 4. There, the analysis of musical methods reveals the presence of musical asymmetry within a larger symmetrical structure, a central idea of my thesis. Apart from a general discussion of specific musical techniques, I use the term "cell" to describe the smaller components within the larger organism of a song. These are the musical devices that I see as essential in defining gamelan tunes as well as math-metal tunes. Defining a sub-genre is problematic, especially when attempting to describe characteristics that can remain constant across musics, such as style and instrumentation. Thus, hybridizing two seemingly opposing cultures is challenging but helps in defining specific musical sensibilities that are jointly utilized. I argue that *Niskala,* while in its infancy, is creating a

meaningful bridge between arts and is helping to create new definitions for hybrid musical culture.

Without pursuing gamelan and metal cultures beyond understood genre specifications, it would be difficult to analyze the parallels in each kind of music. Genres are defined by their musical components and surrounding cultural practice. This includes fandom, festivals, community, and practitioners. Ostensibly representative of cultural norms, metal and gamelan are simply umbrella terms used to generalize music. Within each umbrella are sub-genres and diverse practices that are uniquely isolated in style and ideology. As Marc Perlman writes, "Metaphorical understanding is ubiquitous in music; in every society people conceptualize musical phenomena in terms of nonmusical phenomena" (Perlman 2004: 31). Chapter 3 isolates the two art forms, gamelan baleganjur and math-metal, briefly articulating the crossover as well as the main differences in artistic ideas. Math-metal is a subset of heavy metal that utilizes dissonant chords and erratic rhythmic complexity. Derived from metal-core, the instrumentation in math-metal creates percussive timbres played at fast tempi. The rhythmic complexity is the main component that correlates math-metal with gamelan baleganjur, which is a processional form of gamelan found in Bali, Indonesia. Typically present in cremation ceremonies, baleganjur is now one of the biggest forms of competitive art in Bali because of its virtuosic interaction between performers and exaggerated theatrics. These two art forms may be similar musically, but they seem to be in opposition when it comes to intention and inspiration, again highlighting the juxtaposition of concepts correlating to darkness and negative energy as an air of mystifying and romanticizing the obscurity. That is, artists attributing special attentiveness to ideas of darkness. Separating them

allows us to understand why *Niskala* has chosen to hybridize and mesh these cultures in the creation of an "autonomous" practice.

Niskala's founder Luke Geaney is the leader of the ensemble and the only one to have traveled to Bali for studies. The rest of the band, based in Manchester, England, has only experienced Balinese gamelan and culture from afar, the closest encounter being a gamelan workshop in London. Geaney is passionate about this project but also has the difficult task of relaying what he has learned to his group members. This includes musical and non-musical techniques associated with Balinese gamelan and poses interesting questions, which will be addressed in Chapter 2: 1) How involved in Balinese culture is the rest of the band and how has their artistry developed? 2) Is this sub-community an extension (smaller molds) of larger processes of communal gatherings? 3) What elements of gamelan music has Geaney chosen to implement in his own? I don't attempt to answer these questions with a definitive response, but rather to highlight processes of fusing cultures respectfully. That is, my intention is not to assign a positive or negative value to this project but rather to explore its processes as they allow for the creation of sub-communities and sub-genres.

One main theme will encompass this thesis, supplemented by the underlying ideas of symmetry and asymmetry: finding beauty in darkness. This idea has roots in mythology, ideology, and especially physics. I briefly mention physics as the tendency to think of darkness is in relation to the absence of light or the physical properties regarding what is dark. My intention in discussing darkness does not include this definition. Though an exploration of darkness is enough to fill another thesis, I am not primarily concerned with defining it holistically for this paper. Instead, I conceptualize it within the contexts of

metal and gamelan baleganjur cultures, as it is a driving and prominent force in creating these musics.

Darkness is broadly defined as negative space or energy provoking mystery and mischief. For the average person, these kinds of ideas are typically unattractive and tend to repel rather than attract. I have recently been interested in this in its projection of romanticizing paradox or idealizing juxtaposition within popular musics through darkness. As I will explain more in depth in following passages, musicians practicing math-metal enjoy going against the grain of cultural norms. I know this because I have experienced this first hand and have spoke to math-metal musicians at concert events. Likewise, gamelan baleganjur engages with theatrics that include military-like formation and comedy. This is important to my argument as Niskala embraces seemingly conflicting cultures: baleganjur wards off negative energy while math-metal embraces darkness. As Geaney continues to create compositions for *Niskala*, this playful duality conditions their performativity and functions as an inspirational device in their music-making process.

Metal culture is generally associated with all things dark and, in some instances, demonic figures and symbolism. From Iron Maiden's "Number of the Beast" to Pantera's "Cowboys from Hell" the metal genre is littered with representations of darkness. Fortunately, a majority of the projection of darkness in metal simply helps to inspire music-making. In very extreme cases, though, darkness affects behavior beyond music. The black metal genre is the most notorious for this, as practitioners in bands such as *Mayhem* and *Gorgoroth* were involved in church burnings and explicitly admitted that satanic ideology is a source for both their musical and non-musical activities. Convicted

of their crimes, members of these bands were infamous for their actions and cast metal in a bad light. Of course, these were extreme cases and are by no means representative of metal as a whole. I mention this briefly to give brief context and commentary on the power that darkness holds, especially in regards to how darkness is perceived through gamelan baleganjur.

Gamelan baleganjur is considered a processional music of fallen warriors and is intended to ward off evil spirits. There is, therefore, a certain irony in Niskala's fusion of these two musics; there is an internal struggle in which one half is promoting a dark entity and the other aims to drive out the same force. However, the discussion is not so cut and dry. I will highlight the playful juxtaposition of the two musical cultures, not as a comparative study but rather as a collaborative melding.

My methodology for this thesis primarily draws from my own experiences and fieldwork in Bali and the United States, as well as continuous communicative efforts with Luke Geaney. The interviews for this research conducted from years as part of casual conversation held at local bars in Manchester, Skype sessions, and spontaneous hangouts during our first encounter in Bali. The compound in which Geaney studied gamelan happens to be owned by my family. The importance of this space will be discussed below. Because of the large collection of instruments at our compound in Bali, we had unlimited access to different styles of music. We were frequently being yelled at to turn off loud music or to stop playing the drums during impromptu sessions. Naturally, Geaney and I formalized hangouts to discuss music while reading or having "quiet times." This was to be the setting to a formation of new music and sub-community.

1.2 In Transition: The Origins of Interest

I had just graduated from the University of Colorado at Colorado Springs in 2011 with a bachelor's degree in visual and performing arts and was eager to get back home to the village of Bangah, Bali with my family. Prior to this trip, I hadn't been back to Indonesia in three years; I was due for a visit. Curious to see if anything and anyone has changed, I planned to visit the more tourist-savvy areas in accordance with the leading *sanggars* (Balinese art communes) located in Ubud, the cultural center of Bali. While knowing that my cousins would take me and we could catch up during travels, I did not have to prepare much for departure. It seemed like a familiar trip and I was glad to see that not too much had changed apart from the addition of a few family members, though there was talk of a floating highway to accommodate more road travel for the tourism industry. My family brought a new batch of students for a study abroad session as they do every few years. This was a large bunch from Colorado College, half of which had been playing gamelan for a couple of years. The rest of the students were interested but unquestionably unfamiliar with all things Bali aside from what travel guides have mentioned. None of this experience seemed new to me and I was already acclimated to the system of hosting a lively group of college students. Little did I know that the summer of 2011 would birth many arts communities and new practices within the global gamelan community. One such event was the establishment of *Sanggar Manik Galih*, which had been planned since my family moved to the United States in 1990, and another was the creation of *Niskala*.

Figure 1.1 Sanggar Manik Galih

Just after landing in Bali, my family put me in charge of picking up the first lot of students. I was not too happy with the request, but I agreed to go because I was still jet-lagged and had a strange amount of energy. People were arriving at Ngurah Rai airport in the capital city of Denpasar, Bali from the United States and the United Kingdom. My cousin and I picked up two students and were awaiting the third. The last to arrive was a gentleman from England named Luke Geaney. Shortly after the formalities, we discovered that our musical practices and interests were similar: we were both fascinated with similar musics and wanted to fuse gamelan with metal music. His story of discovering gamelan and serendipitously finding channels to learn was extraordinary. He

explained that he contacted gamelan guru I Made Lasmawan[1] after attending a social gathering in Manchester, England. There he had met a former student of the guru from the University of Colorado at Boulder. Geaney, who had just been exposed to Balinese *gong kebyar*, made his interests the first point of conversation to the other guests at the party. He finally met a man who studied with I Made Lasmawan in Colorado and Bali and began conversing. They exchanged information and Geaney booked a flight to Indonesia the very next summer.

Geaney stayed at our family compound with the rest of the students and left after one month. At the time, he was one of the only students to study at the *sanggar* without any affiliation with an academic institution. This allowed him to attend the classes that interested him personally while being able to meander the island as he saw fit. In this time, he participated in gamelan performances for temple ceremonies as well as entertainment for the village mass. He even got the chance to perform at the lake temple, *Beratan*, which not many foreigners get to do. Luckily, the village of Bangah, where Geaney was staying, partly owned the temple and the lake it was on. The rest of the residents were on a study abroad trip connected with Colorado College in Colorado Springs.

During our stay at the compound, students had an allotted amount of time to relax and mingle or venture. Most of the students preferred staying in an area that was closer to Balinese village life but of course there were some that would rather stay in the more tourist heavy places to have their party needs met. Luckily, the program allowed for a

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[1] I Made Lasmawan is a gamelan master from the village of Bangah, Bali. He currently resides in Colorado and is director of more than six gamelan ensembles in the Front-range region.

good balance of the two, if desired. In our first week I recall a conversation with Geaney involving our personal fondness of avant-garde musics and what kind of projects were in store for the future. This included arguing about the group Mr. Bungle and salivating over an amalgam of math-metal bands. To our surprise, we had a common fascination with combining gamelan with heavy metal and we bonded over this camaraderie. Four years later, I found myself in Manchester, England where Geaney had started his band Niskala.

In Balinese, the term *niskala* can be translated as "the occult that propels the material world" (Eisman, Jr. 1990). Driven by this idea, the gamelan math-metal band Niskala creates their own magic through their sonic palette. Tying this with how the body is perceived in these musics, we can see ideas embodied through a musico-physiological lens. How do the performers move in relation to the music? Does it embody more metal or gamelan conceptualization? Is theatrical attire a factor in movement? All of these questions get answered through the musicians' understanding and experience of both cultures. From there, the creative styles and techniques are rooted in performativity as well as musicality. The bulk of this thesis is concerned with parsing out all the components and origins of their musical hybridization. Throughout, I will allude to literature that introduces musical hybridity in other cultures while I problematize common terms used by authors to extrapolate the loose ends of discussing appropriation. To appropriate implies borrowing from a culture without permission. I see this definition as problematic when concentrating on an ensemble that is still in formation. Niskala is a band that is going through this process. I hope to use the term without the negative connotations. While my own experiences propel this particular project, I also look to the greater gamelan community for their thoughts and advice on approaching musical

figures. They have been a large component of and important symbol in my communal activity over the past few years living in California. For that reason, I analyze Niskala's first extended play album titled *Panak* to highlight the band's musical sensibilities and to look for interest within local communities.

1.2.1 Sanggar Manik Galih

> The three *dharma* or duties help to realize the overarching goals of preservation and development of Balinese arts. By studying the traditional arts in their courses, students learn the cultural background of these art forms as well as the means to recreate them in performance (Heimarck 2003: 154).

In 2011, the arts commune *Sanggar Manik Galih* was established as a global community of gamelan artists and a school of performance. Created by I Made Lasmawan and Ni Ketut Marni in the village of Bangah, Bali, the *sanggar* was the embodiment of a philosophy to preserve traditional Indonesian arts while innovating new musics. Classes for every skill level are available but as a utilitarian activity. It is a space for people to learn to play gamelan, dance, and collaborate on new projects. A *sanggar* is a collective of artists situated outside an academic institution. Typically in Bali, people use the word *sekaha* when describing a group of gamelan artists. As ethnomusicologist, Lisa Gold says, "Known as *sekaha*, these organizations exist for rice cultivation, neighborhood decision making, religious ceremonies, and music making" (Gold 2005: 54). Different than the Balinese *sekaha,* which is translatable to "art troupe," a *sanggar* refers more to a school. *Manik Galih*'s relationship to diasporic communities currently links together the United States, Indonesia, and the United Kingdom. With the *sanggar* located in Bali, foreign students are afforded an opportunity to perform and study

Balinese gamelan as well as *tari* (dance) in a village context. After returning from Bali, students often continue to play in ensembles already established outside of Bali or they create artist communities of their own, such as Niskala. This section discusses the formation of a hybrid ensemble/sub-genre as an extension of the philosophies of creating a global *sanggar*. The overall trajectory of the discussion traces the sonic roots and practice of the band while situating sources of relations historically.

The Balinese *sanggar* has traditionally created a structural forum of artists that establishes village identity. Members of a particular *sanggar* are typically localized within their own village or regency. Generally, arts families are in charge of these particular schools and organize philosophies proposed for the commune. The *sanggar* is not necessarily established to serve ritual functions but is able to do so if the greater community lacks a particular ensemble for ceremony. The *sanggar* puts production and craft at the forefront of praxis. They tend to be just a portion of the greater *sekaha* in the village. *Sanggars* embody sub-communities that delegate the definition of ensemble agency.

Each *sanggar* has agency over their philosophies in creating art and do not typically deviate from their style. For example, *Sanggar Cudamani* practices traditional repertoire and continuously redefines group virtuosity; *Sanggar Ceraken* is renowned for its work primarily in *musik kontemporer* (contemporary music); and *Sanggar Mekar Bhuana* has continued to develop its practice within the ancient gamelan selonding. These examples attest to the diverse practices and defining repertoire performed by the *sanggar*. None is actively trying to be different from one another: these differences arise due to

circumstances regarding community development or just the ownership of particular resources.

Ownership of a specific gamelan set typically occurs through preservation of long-standing instruments, personal investment, or if the village can afford to purchase one. In the former case, the formulation of a *sanggar* would revolve around utilizing existing resources. Finding artistic foundation in prior instruments is a common phenomenon. Each *sanggar* has to mold their practice around the particular styles associated with the specific instruments and their materiality and physicality. I Made Lasmawan has spent a number of years working to collect his very own instruments for the enjoyment of others to use at *Sanggar Manik Galih.*

Although most of these *sanggar* are world renowned, there are very few that localize and migrate as *Sanggar Manik Galih* does. It is a global school that is not transfixed to one region. Developing relationships in cultures that have very different ideological functionality allows *Sanggar Manik Galih* to be an organism that continuously adapts and never ceases to learn, a concept that I Made Lasmawan holds close to heart. This is largely due to the fact that he finds home in the United States a majority of the year and travels back to Bali during study abroad sessions or larger ceremonial gatherings in the village of Bangah.

Made Lasmawan, started this idea of a global sanggar when he first moved to the United States in 1990 from Bangah. Under one simple philosophy, his work has continuously promoted the exposure to rich gamelan arts to anyone that is interested: “semua manusia adalah seorang tak bisa berhenti belajar. Harus tetap belajar yang tersedia.” [All human beings are people that cannot stop learning. You have to learn as

much as available] (Lasmawan interview 2014). Lasmawan's status in the United States as adjunct professor and artist-in-residence has given him a chance to work with a diverse group of people. Over time, he has learned that communities, not just individuals, have different capacities to learn as groups. The overall group virtuosity comes from both cohesion and practice within the abilities of its collective membership: there is no formulaic or universal way to teach multiple ensembles.

Lasmawan continues to travel and teach at multiple universities/community ensembles all over the United States. Even though he teaches different kinds of gamelan to these groups (i.e. *gong kebyar, angklung, semara dana, semar pegulingan, gender wayang*), the musical repertoire rarely changes throughout the year. Of course, Lasmawan is not the first gamelan instructor from Indonesia to teach in the United States. A common hardship for gamelan professors outside of Indonesia is the inconsistency of committed group members in ensembles. For example, gamelan ensembles in universities may only require students to enroll in one semester of a gamelan course. They attend class for about two to six hours a week and then after their ten-week stay, they move on. This is problematic for various reasons but I will only highlight two as relevant to my argument. The first is that in having to teach new students in rapid succession, gamelan professors recycle repertoire and may be saturated at times. The second is that because gamelan is typically learned by rote, students playing for a short amount of time may never understand the nuances and feeling of how gamelan actually functions. Lasmawan has devised his own methods in dealing with these sorts of problems. One method he uses is to create easier and user-friendly interlocking methods to specific repertoire without diminishing or harming the art form. His compositions highlight these factors and are the

reason they are so malleable and fun to play for various skill levels. They are constructed in a way that is designed to be elastic and narrate his artistic voice even if played by novices.

Lasmawan's journey in creating *Sanggar Manik Galih* highlights a serendipitous chain of events. During his beginning years in the North America, Lasmawan went from teaching at San Diego State University to accepting an artist residency in Denver, Colorado and finally settling at Colorado College in Colorado Springs. The latter two events were the defining moments to the beginning of a front-range gamelan community. During a performance with Gamelan Tunas Mekar of Denver (which Lasmawan currently directs), ethnomusicologist Victoria Lindsay Levine happened to be in the audience. She was invited by a Tunas Mekar member and without knowing it at the time, Lasmawan and Levine would create a new position at Colorado College allowing for permanent residency of a foreign adjunct professor in the United States. He would eventually take on a "Johnny Appleseed" role as Lasmawan planted at least five gamelan ensembles in the front-range region. The migration of arts communities and formations of new ones such as *Niskala* hones in on this diasporic process. Without the push and pull of having to mold existing repertoire it would become more difficult to adhere to everyone's personal subjective sensibilities. Lasmawan has always been a strict teacher but is driven by his philosophy of provoking creativity: "You need to show people that gamelan is fun or else you will have no one to play and thus, nothing matters" (Lasmawan interview).

Sanggar Manik Galih's transnational migration encourages the emergence of sub-communities as a way to extend traditional and experimental practices. I put forth the idea that *Niskala* is a sub-community of *Sanggar Manik Galih* as gamelan math-metal is

a sub-genre of metal. As discussed later in this paper, the musical ideas and techniques appropriated by *Niskala* to create their own marketable artistic practice is a small component of how gamelan actually functions. This extraction of very particular decisions in musical hybridity alludes to the notion that, in order to cherry-pick their musical devices, the band and creator have to immerse themselves in understanding musical communities.

1.2.2 Hot Bone

Prior to Niskala, Geaney created a math-metal duo project named *Hot Bone*. This project presented a transition into Niskala and foreshadowed the use of math-metal in the newer Niskala sound. Even *Hot Bone* itself was something of a hybrid during its early years. Geaney recalls, "Hot Bone started in maybe 2006-7? I just wanted to make a band that was a cross between Lightning Bolt and Hella. My goal was to sound like two guitarists at once" (Geaney web interview). His desire to combine elements of two math-metal bands that inspired him defined and guided him toward a specific musicality. In order to be pragmatic and continue to have as much creative autonomy as possible, Geaney wanted to keep the instrumentation minimal. This way, the duo could play smaller venues and not take up a lot of time for set-up.

> That was the brief. I knew Dave Jay (drummer) already so [I] played him some riffs and he was in. The only thing that transfers between them really is that I write all the stuff so my riff and playing style kinda permeates each inevitably. Blamelan (working title!) was written at the end of Hot Bone and was gonna be a Hot Bone track I think-hence it is quite different to other Niskala tunes (ibid).

While Geaney hints that tunes could be used for either Hot Bone or Niskala, the two bands are clearly different in their sounds and intentions. Compared to Hot Bone, Niskala

called for a thicker sound and more instruments. Instead of the minimal two-person band, the new project expanded its roster and integrated gamelan baleganjur and Balinese aesthetics.

Figure 1.2 Hot Bone

A jump-start for Geaney, Hot Bone was already grounded in very heavy hybridity. The meshing of inspirational bands allowed him to build on what he already established and provided the necessary tools to create a new ensemble to call his own.

1.3 Framework for musical hybridity

The current discourse in musical hybridity discusses cross-cultural phenomena as a means of creating communal agency. I sought out literature that addressed audience reception to popular artists while also looking at sensorial reaction. For this particular study, the idea of laughter fueled my interests. Aside from my fieldwork and virtual

ethnography, a majority of my sources come from literature discussing metal culture and gamelan as a whole. Most of the theory I use draws from Neriko Doerr's idea of "learning through laughter" and cultural ideologies. Again, this is supplement to my experiences with laughter of people in reaction to experiencing Niskala.

Doerr discusses the processes by which an artist is subject to trivial reactions from spectators before being taken seriously. This act of comedic intervention is necessary in the process as it allows for a dramatic sensation to imprint into a person's psyche. She explains that her research is based on audience reaction when initially presented with a musical form that is at the center of national identity: enka is the heart and soul of Japan (Doerr 2010). Doerr frames her thoughts with the idea and act of laughter as being a stimulus for people to learn of a new subjectivity. As Doerr argues, "laughter serves as an acknowledgement of one's ignorance, pushing one to learn" (Doerr 2012). This idea correlates to a principle philosophy in Balinese masked dances called *topeng,* in which practitioners must learn to laugh at themselves before the audience even has a chance to laugh at them. This way, the audience can reflect on their actions and not have to "correct" their "socially unacceptable behavior" (Bergson 1956). Niskala uses *topeng* masks in their performance and this will be examined in depth later on.

Although Doerr utilizes this framework to analyze racial landscape in Japan, I argue that a similar model can emphasize the formations of diasporic communities. She talks about a musical form that a nation holds dearly as it is in the process of redefining the racial boundaries of performance: an African-American male performing enka at top level. Redefining art is what I argue to be a movement in establishing new identities. Niskala is comprised of people from Manchester, England that is promoting Balinese

culture. In later chapters, I discuss these processes in the establishment of sub-genres and sub-cultures projected by Niskala.

Hybridity concerning two modes of music based on oppositional ideologies makes creation of new sub-communities worthy of study. It contextualizes a changing world temporally while understanding a shift of a sonic palette. Specific to this study, are the elements found in metal music and gamelan that interest a global audience. Through this research and study, I hope to better understand processes of extending sub-genres as sub-communities while re-thinking definitions representing ensembles in infancy. Niskala is an extension of sanggar Manik Galih.

Chapter II: Niskala

Figure 2.1 Niskala

The interplay of the tangible with the intangible, a common theme in Balinese philosophy, highlights a necessity to practice what is thought. Narratives based on the constant struggle or inner turmoil within a person have been mythologized and mystified in Balinese cultural iconography. This chapter briefly examines the cosmology and meaning of the term *niskala* and also discusses its significance for the band Niskala as a whole.[2] In regards to the band, the concept of *niskala* is exemplified in their musicality and theatrics of performativity. This occult is what inspires the name of the band.

[2] I use Niskala to refer to the band name and *niskala* as the Balinese philosophy.

2.1 Niskala: The Occult

As mentioned previously, *niskala* is a complex concept centered on intangibility and is almost always paired in discussion with *sekala* or the tangible. Rather than being opposites of one another, this philosophy rejects such dualities and instead depends on the presence of both components: neither *sekala* nor *niskala* can exist without the other.

Bali is known for the lack of a distinct separation of secular and supernatural, leading to an abundance of ceremonies throughout the year. The *sekala*/*niskala* pairing presents, rather than a disregard of negative energy, an acknowledgement of a counterbalance. A passage from Fred B. Eisman, Jr. briefly explains:

> Hindu-Balinese religious philosophy embraces the principle that for every good, positive, constructive force, there is a counterbalancing evil, negative, destructive force. The two sides are inseparable. They must necessarily coexist, but preferably in dynamic equilibrium, so that neither get the upper hand...equilibrium and balance are key goals. (Eisman 1990: 128)

Although Eisman uses words such as evil and negative, the Balinese do not have a term translating exactly this way. That being said, the notion of balance is absolutely central to the concept of *niskala* and, it seems, to the gamelan math-metal band Niskala.

2.2 Niskala: The Band

In February of 2015 I had the opportunity to meet Niskala and speak to them about their project. My travels were short but I spent every day with the band and experienced how Bali was being represented in Manchester, England. Fortunately, I was able to watch their practice, attend their performance at a local loft venue, and even saw the process of a changing roster. The addition of a new member was in part to fill in for absent members but also to expand the group for a bigger sound. This was hard to conceptualize,

considering the small size of the space in which Niskala rehearsed barely allowed me to join in. Nonetheless, my time with the band was profound and informative for understanding the processes of creating sub-genres/sub-communities.

Niskala's unique artistic structure emerges out of multiple metal side projects. Comprising eight musicians from various metal sub-genres, the ensemble generates hybridity through membership alone. The ensemble is made up of Luke Geaney on kempli, drums, and occasionally guitar; Zee on vocals and dance; Carl Gale on ceng-ceng kopyak; Jason Holloway on ceng-ceng kopyak; Rob Sewell on electric guitar and suling; Chris Bird on electric guitar; Alex Carley on electric bass; Iain Kidd on drums; and the latest addition to the group, Mark Heron, on drums. Barely able to fit on a loft stage, the band has a unique set-up of instruments that provides the texture for this genre. The drum sets are hybridized cocktail kits that are composed of an elevated floor tom, a snare drum, and a bamboo block. This configuration of instruments has the potential to be quite loud.

Just as in Balinese gamelan ensembles, the members of Niskala are paired off to utilize the interlocking practice known as *kotekan*. While arguably similar in sound to conventional metal instrumentation, this interlocking is key to their performativity. Otherwise, they might just sound like another math-metal band with an air of exoticism. Many reviews online exemplify the elementary understanding of "heavy music" as a whole.

> Mastering quiet to loud dynamics Niskala realise the importance of building tension before unleashing their vicious tribal racket. Off kilter rhythms keep you on the end of your seat waiting for the next barrage of distortion and snarling vocals. Imagine abandoning members of Sikth and Secret Chiefs 3 on an island with only instruments and 70s horror films to inspire them and you'll be close to the disturbing yet engrossing sounds of this intriguing release (www.ghostcultmag.com)

Although the electric guitars utilize kotekan as well, they also have the task of establishing *pokok*, or melody. Interweaving between percussive/rhythmic functionality and melodic embellishment provides compositional modality. Because gamelan only uses some form of a parametric pentatonic scale (some combination of five notes), it forces composers to be rhythmically creative with minimal resources. This practice becomes a standard of structure to performance technique. The initial intention to use such hocketed rhythms (kotekan) was for the production of faster arpeggios than could be accomplished otherwise. *Niskala* utilizes kotekan but does not necessarily need to because of the techniques used by math-metal practitioners. As an example in gamelan, one hand strikes a key while the other mutes so as to not create unnecessary resonance. This technique does not need to be implemented with a drum set, as the sustain of a drum is short upon attack and doesn't have any unnecessary resonance. As I spoke to the rest of the band, I began to understand their approach to this music through their experiences with other instruments.

In addition to experiencing a day in the life of Niskala, I spent time in between practices to watch some of the side projects perform at local metal venues. Carl Gale and Rob Sewell performed with their other band Lester Verde at local venue Grand Central. They played a set as a trio, with Gale on electric bass and Sewell on drums performing standard metal music. I asked the two what was predominately different about playing in Niskala and they mentioned having to listen more closely to the pulse. The pulse I'm referring to here is the *kempli* instrument found in most Balinese gamelan ensembles and played by Luke Geaney in Niskala.

In Bali, the *kempli* (sometimes referred to as *tawa-tawa* in other styles) is considered "the teacher" for reasons concerning the relationship of leading and following. The idea is that just as the teacher-student dynamic is reciprocal, so should be the idea of learning. Gamelan musicians playing more sub-divided or embellished rhythms and melodies will hear the pulse as a guideline to performance. Likewise, even though requiring very little technique to create a good sound, the *kempli* player has to listen to how the beat fits in accordance to the sub-divisions. This makes it one of the hardest jobs in a gamelan and explains why Geaney is responsible for it in Niskala.

As with many metal bands, the lead vocalist is responsible for aiding the crowd and coaxing theatrics. The lyrics used by Niskala are unique and are not inconsistent with the way the language of Kawi[3] is thought of in Bali. I asked Geaney and lead vocalist Zee about their use of text in their compositions.

> There are no lyrics though - it was/is all improvised! This was/is basically because in my Sekala and Niskala book it says that the dalang use Kawi, which few if any of the audience understand. So we decided that, seeing as none of us speak Kawi, we would just create something none of the audience could understand to at least replicate that aspect of things. (Geaney, Facebook interview, 2015)

Niskala continues to perform improvisatory vocals but, during my time in Manchester, Zee mentioned hoping to study with a Balinese *dalang* (puppeteer) someday to better understand Balinese culture.

Theatrics and visual aesthetics play a very prudent role in the performativity systemized by Niskala. Each person in the band puts on a traditional Balinese mask as their personification and character portrayed. The characters include common folk,

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[3] *Kawi* is the Sanskrit word, meaning "poet". It stems from Old Javanese and is still used in Bali, Java, and Lombok.

jesters, and refined figures. In addition to the masks, every member wears traditional black and white sarong typically used by *kecak* (vocal gamelan) performers. When performing, they are shirtless and their skin is bare. As a whole, the band's appearance alludes to a brotherhood of mythical entities head-banging to very pronounced movement.

Masks in Bali known as *topeng*, are worn in dances and are some of the most respected art practices on and off the island. The characters in *topeng* represent a mythologized story or have close ties with spirituality and intertwine between representation of the *sekala*, or tangible world. For these reasons, masks can be very sacred once they are put through a ritual process to bring a spirit into the item – otherwise they are just objects. For example, the topeng *Sidha Karya* is performed during purification ceremonies. Used specifically to ward off evil spirits during the creation of new homes, this particular dance is required before the home can be fully purified. Although not all topeng dances carry this much power, each mask is sacred in respect to the persona it embodies.

The members of Niskala take on various personas in the band. Even if not necessarily a direct correlation to the mask at hand, they undeniably perform a character that is ethereal in nature. This comments on their bond as an entity and at times, a direct portrayal of their sub-community. They are choosing to embody a particular archetype that symbolizes the metal community in Manchester. Because Niskala chooses to fuse gamelan aesthetics into their music, their line-up of members continues to expand. This means that their characters and flow of personal image continues to adapt. In parallel, their music will mold as well.

2.3 Gamelan Math-metal as a sub-genre/community

Sub-genres not only categorize and classify music into smaller scopes, but they are also locations of community-oriented arts. In Chapter 1, I discussed the events leading to the creation of a gamelan math-metal community/sub-genre. As mentioned previously, the idea of a *sanggar* as a genre is more than a useful metaphor, as it sets up the *sanggar* as a locality of innovation. It is a forum in which to learn traditional music and also a way to foster new ideas as praxis supplementing theoretical models; it is a way to embody darkness.

Niskala located in Manchester gives them all creative agency and popularity as the only ensemble to integrate gamelan into metal. This is due to the fact that they are far from an established gamelan community and they are the only band hybridizing gamelan baleganjur with math-metal. They are able to market themselves as such and also give the community something different in a genre with which they are directly involved. As an industrial and urban area, there is no shortage of metal-heads in Manchester. Speaking to some of the audience members at a Niskala performance, I asked a basic and general question of what they thought of the music. A majority of the responses involved attraction to the band because the sound was still true to math-metal but had enough exoticism to be intriguing.

Being a part of the audience was somewhat conflicting to me at times for reasons concerning movement and activity: I had no idea how to react to the music and it seemed the other audience members tried earnestly to find a way to express themselves. The best I could do was to put my mental state in that of the social dance *joged bumbung* (a Balinese social dance that does not require any formal dancing conventions). This

seemed to be the best option apart from the tendency to circle into a mosh pit, as the rhythms in the music are jagged and it is very difficult to dance to sound that is asymmetrical in nature.

I attended one of their shows when I was in Manchester in the winter of 2015. The venue was *KRAAK*, on the third floor of a building in a narrow alleyway at Stevenson Square. Carrying amplifiers and percussion instruments up the winding stairs was quite a challenge but we managed to get everything up to the venue in good time. It also helped that *Niskala's* practice space was right across the street. After all the equipment was set up, the venue ambiance began to take form. Typically before a show, the venue will play pre-recorded music to fill the sonic space and to entertain the guests. *Niskala*'s show was the first metal or just general rock concert I had been to where the pre-show recording blared gamelan gong kebyar. It was a strange but familiar feeling of comfortable displacement. Not only is the aesthetic of a live gamelan recording in a metal venue unique but gamelan as pre-show music would never happen anywhere else, not even other gamelan shows. Even outside of Bali where gamelan is performed as entertainment, pre-show recordings are odd juxtapositions against the event.

Some members of the audience simply lingered, holding their beers without any apparent reaction to the music. Others organized into groups around those with a bit of knowledge about gamelan. Because I was the only Balinese person at the venue, several attendees asked me questions about it. We created conversation, which eventually led to discussing how much we enjoyed Niskala's music and theatrics. In some instances, the band even offered first-hand, backstage gamelan lessons. In a Facebook post, members of

Niskala are shown playing a gamelan instrument with a band member from the shared performance bill.

Niskala is a band that is still forming its roots and arranging foundations around varied musical interests. Between their sonic palette, visual aesthetic, and understanding of communicative structure, their praxis is oriented toward the creation of new music. It is quite obvious that the music is not the only component of Balinese culture attracting and inspiring this band. They have adopted ideas found in Balinese culture and ideology not to convert from their own beliefs but to locate their artistic sensibilities in a culture not easily accessible to all. They are intending to create their own community by bringing together gamelan and math-metal.

Chapter III: Math-metal and Baleganjur

Hybridity within the genre of heavy metal is a common practice for reasons concerning commodification and identity construction. Bands that decide to embrace hybridity do so in order to market themselves as unique or one-of-a-kind. For this reason, many heavy metal musicians adopt irony as part of their musical foundation to endorse a playful attitude within otherwise "serious" music. The juxtaposition of artistic ideas between different modalities makes the metal genre behave like a constantly developing organism. I will explain this idea later, in Chapter 4, in an analysis of Niskala's extended play album, not linearly but in isolated rhythmic motifs that I call "cells."

In this chapter, I isolate math-metal and gamelan baleganjur in order to identify each as distinct modalities. From cultural context to intention, the musics differ greatly from one another. Even considered purely as sound, they offer very distinct features and develop different group timbres. It is important to analyze each in its traditional form so we can begin to determine if the choices for hybridization necessarily work. Was the emergence of both musical styles a by-product of similar cultural shifts? Does the brash sound of both of these musics correlate to community struggle of any sort? I do not plan to answer these questions entirely but rather pave a path of thought. My interest and intention is to bring forth any commonalities in communal shifts and explore whether Niskala's music hybridizes for any reason other than the intertwining of two artistic genres.

3.1 Math-metal

Although the term math-metal (also referred to as math-core) has very little to do with mathematical functions, the music itself can seem systemic and formulaic. As an all-encompassing definition, math-metal is itself a hybrid of metal and punk cultures that utilizes multiple time signatures articulated in an asymmetrical pulse or groove. Not to be conflated with grunge, likely the best known such hybrid, math-core identifies as a music and culture adhering closer to the metal sensibility. It encompasses more virtuosic practice and performing at some peak threshold. This includes a lower timbral range as well as high rhythmic tempi. For the purposes of this thesis, I will emphasize the stylistic specificity of math-metal's groove, which arises from local asymmetry as a component of a larger symmetrical musical structure.

While math-metal seems to align more closely with metal sub-genres, bands and artists emerging in this practice tend to do so as rebellion against any one identifying categorization and adhere to the idea of their music standing apart from genre. For example, the band Animals As Leaders is often categorized as a "djent" metal band but would consider that label to be neither correct nor incorrect.[4] That particular band is a trio of musicians that finds its roots in heavy metal, gospel drumming, jazz improvisation, and classical guitar, none of which necessarily contributes to a specific classification.

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[4] This term highlights the potential for genre classifications being established unintentionally. The genre now known as djent developed as the creator of the band Periphery was ostensibly describing his fascination with a particular guitar sound. He described this hyper-power chord as a major component of the overall sound he was looking for in his band. Inadvertently, the math-metal community attached the term djent to Periphery's overall sound and created a new sub-genre.

This very notion of labeling ambiguity is what provides a continuous discourse and artistic malleability within the metal genre.

From a visual standpoint, a metal performance rarely takes place on a lit stage or even during the day. Ideally, metal concerts happen in dark venues. Interestingly enough, the fashion at these events includes black or very dark t-shirts and dark pants. Audience members help in creating a darker visual aesthetic in the performance experience. Although bands and promoters necessarily hold this idea in their mind when booking a tour or venue, the location of a dimly lit space to perform art that represents darkness is consistent to the theme. I would argue that this enhances the musical experience and gives the lighting choreographer a more interesting practice in synchronizing strobes with syncopated rhythm. Nonetheless, math-metal is not defined by visual aesthetics. It is first and foremost a musico-physiological and acoustic experience.

3.1.1 The Sound of Math-metal

By taking conventional heavy metal or rock instrumentation and breaking up symmetrical rhythmic frames, math-metal creates a palette of sonic textures that can seem harsh or abrasive. A typical configuration of instruments includes two electric guitars, one bass guitar, one drum set, and a singer or screamer. Although this is the conventional set-up for this kind of music, a trend currently is to embrace minimal instrumentation. Groups such as Lightning Bolt or Ruins comprise two or three members. While the tendency in metal bands is to have a big and full sound, math-metal frequently finds its identity in erratic high tempi, giving the illusion of sporadic intensity and overwhelming the listener.

Drum set players have a unique approach to their instrument so as to supplement math-metal's erratic musicality. A technique common in metal music called blast beats, or sixteenth notes played in rapid succession, is a virtuosic endurance practice that helps to create a wall of sound. Math-metal drum set players combine this with more linear playing, striking one drum at a time, so that each sound cuts through the blast beat wall. These syncopated accents allow the music to take specific form, creating foundations for math-metal tunes.

Math-metal pieces develop either as multiple rhythmic motifs that are constantly shifting or as heavily syncopated ostinatos within a symmetrical groove involving some articulated accent, such as a backbeat. A sensation of inconsistency created by these rhythmic themes is characteristic to the genre and constitutes the "math" portion of the term; the rhythmic structure alludes to mathematical functions, even if math is excluded from the compositional process.

Although the instrumentation found in math-metal is not unique, the timbre sought out by musicians defines the genre as noisy or heavy. Math-metal bands tend to have multiple electric guitars running through monstrous amplification systems embellished with distortion effects alongside large drum sets that reverberate and project through thick textures of sound. Combining these elements is enough to shake a musical venue but this is only a small facet of what defines a math-metal band.

3.1.2 Differences in math-metal

The genre of math-metal is defined under the broad umbrella of the greater metal genre. Its major distinguishing features are based on rhythmic structure and sonic

embellishments. Some bands choose to demarcate rhythmic motifs by techniques such as playing around a backbeat and some choose to obliterate a symmetrical pulse. This seemingly straightforward choice is a significant element in the construction and negotiation of bands' identities. A fascinating component to math-metal is the absence of any conventional compositional guidelines found in other rock structures or pop tendencies. Traditional choruses rarely appear and, when they do, provide a sonic stability that contrasts against the metric turbulence. This delineation and differentiation within math-metal is important for more effectively categorizing Niskala.

Bands such as Meshuggah and Periphery create compositions utilizing asymmetrical ostinatos or metric modulation as their musical foundation. The music is deceptively danceable due to the integration of a coherent pulse. Imperative in this subset of math-metal is the idea of playing around a beat and establishing a groove. Many times, drummers in these bands will specify a symmetrical meter with a backbeat or accent and use embellishments that play around the foundation. Importantly, listeners can easily find the pulse as the music begins, regardless of metric modulation or through-composition. This associates an inherent musico-physiological gesture that embodies culture as subjectivity. As Tim Rice says, "Music is used as a resource linking the individual and the social in two ways: physical response and agency" (Rice 2014: 50). The physical response emphasizes one's understanding of the musical implications within the context of irregular rhythms super-imposed on a bigger symmetrical structure.

On the other end of the spectrum are bands such as The Dillinger Escape Plan and Yowie that propel their songs with the illusion of lack of recurring motives. "The mechanistic drumming of Chris Pennie, the drummer for the Dillinger Escape Plan,

couples with the two guitarists' exceedingly fast guitar riffs to create perhaps the busiest rhythms in modern metal" (Osborn 2011: 7). The idea behind this practice is to keep fluidity in a piece without the capacity to latch on to any one theme. By doing so, the inclination toward boredom is destroyed, and thus the rhythmic nuances (accented rhythms in a linear pattern) are not so subtle. These groups also use methods to transition between motifs that are very similar to the structures of through-composition in contemporary baleganjur, which will be discussed later on. "Cyclic sections may be connected with transitional passages that do not repeat" (Gold 2005: 137).

Melodies constructed by groups like Botch or Converge tend to incorporate dissonant chords and, in most cases, atonality as a means to mimic percussive timbres. In these bands, the chord structures are derivative of the abrasive and aggressive qualities that arise from striking objects. They are meant to be brash and unpleasant, creating chaotic and percussive textures. Conversely, bands like Protest the Hero and The Human Abstract tend to be referred to as melodic math-metal because of their use of a tonal center.

Encompassing many different styles within its own sub-genre, math-metal offers the possibility of independent musical identities based on diverse facets and features. Despite these potential differences, though, the sub-genre's many members share certain key qualities that connect them together. It defines the sub-genre and formulates a cultural archetype from working with limited musical resources. In math-metal, it is the creative practice of metric modulation with a small sub-set of notes. Kofi Agawu characterizes it as, "an aspect of expression, created and judged by notions of 'good taste' and by the degree of unity attained by the work's elements" (Kofi Agawu 1991: 26).

3.2 Gamelan Baleganjur

Gamelan baleganjur is one of Bali's loudest and most innovative styles of music; it can be heard in both secular and sacred performance. Some recent innovations include extended instrumentation and re-creating formal musical structures. Baleganjur is a form of marching gamelan that was traditionally used as music of war as well as religious ceremonies, such as cremations. In this section, I draw largely from my experience performing and teaching baleganjur in Balinese contexts as well as in the United States. As a supplement to my own involvement with the art, I refer to ethnomusicologist Michael B. Bakan's book *Music of Death and New Creation*, which is currently the authoritative source for gamelan baleganjur. I do so to highlight facts about baleganjur structures and tradition but also to attest to my own qualms about his findings on cultural functions.

The instruments provide a sonic palette intended to instill fear in opponents and confuse evil spirits. This coincides with a Balinese belief that evil spirits are only capable of traveling in straight lines (symmetry) and so the music has to be chaotic (asymmetry) enough to render them astray. Understanding this is significant during cremation ceremonies where gamelan baleganjur is traditionally played. Part of the belief for Balinese people is that evil spirits roam the roads and are continuously mischievous when the tangible world may be less receptive. In order to baffle the evil spirits and lead them astray from the procession of transporting a body, the gamelan baleganjur ensemble will make their way to the roads first and create loud and chaotic music before the rest of the family proceeds. This contextualization is significant, as I will refer to the importance of

chaos later in the paper. Although baleganjur is still performed for religious functions in Bali, it is considered a staple in contemporary musical competitions.

Virtuosity is but a glimmer in the array of cymbals, gongs, and drums. The instrumentation for baleganjur varies and is never consistent from one village to the next but at least six members are needed for the music to work (typically, more than 16 people would be playing). The basic instrumentation is as follows: *ceng ceng kopyak, gong ageng, bende, kempul, kendang, reyong, kempli*. More instruments in each sector are ideal since the intended goal is to be precise and loud and to develop structure in chaos. Different than the instrumentation of a conventional *gong kebyar* or *angklung*, baleganjur does not utilize the *gangsa* instruments as a melodic facet; they are omitted partially due to the processional performativity of baleganjur. "Baleganjur is distinctive on account of a conspicuous absence of bronze-keyed metallophones" (Bakan 1999: 41). I should also note that there are certain instances in processional gamelan where *gangsa* instruments would be suspended and carried between people. Nonetheless, baleganjur's instrumentation is uniquely convenient to carry.

Prominent in competition is the tangible cohesion emerging out of ensemble virtuosity. Interlocking patterns being played at high tempi is just one component that makes this music lively and exciting. Baleganjur performances are filled with choreographed theatrics and lengthy travels that tend to test endurance. I remember visiting a baleganjur competition in 2007 and thinking how cheesy the theatrics of this fashionable marching band were. Much of my discomfort was cringe-worthy due to the fact that I would be physically uncomfortable performing this great music this way. I soon came to realize that doing any activity while playing this music is remarkable and

highly complex, and thus developed a fascinated appreciation for the choreography. The concept of *gaya* (style, swagger, theatrics) becomes an integral part of baleganjur aesthetic especially in the context of competition. It defines the musical sub-genre to include communication between performers through synchronous choreography. “Style becomes an ‘isolatable’ and ‘definable’ [system] of expression.” Style is then described figuratively as “a way of focusing a language, which then becomes a dialect or language in its own right” (Agawu 1991: 8).

In Bali today, gamelan baleganjur is one of the prime artistic channels for competition between villages. It is filled with theatrics that accompany the precision of playing hockets in rapid succession. Bakan articulates the experience of one of his first viewings of a competition. At the end of the two groups performing, he asked a local person about won and the response was, “who cares?” This seemed to be the mentality of the rest of the audience as they dispersed rather quickly. These reactive responses to a performance that regards competition as a central activity is something that I argue to be necessary for creating such innovative music and an idea similar to Doerr’s “learning through laughter.” The transition from a heightened response in baleganjur competition (village pride) to the carelessness of any potential winner compares to laughing at an artistic product as a locus for learning musical normativity.

3.2.1 The Sound of Baleganjur

Today, gamelan baleganjur is as intricate as it has ever been. Its appearance in secular performances of competition has made baleganjur a main spectacle for communities and village locals. Combining an intense sonic palette with peak physical performance lends

the artists to participate in a very elaborate community practice. "*Gamelan balaganjur* takes the idea of group cooperation to its maximum: in order for the musicians to be able to walk while playing, each plays only a single gong, drum, or pair of crash cymbals" (Gold 2005: 114). This idea is the epitome of ensemble virtuosity. In order to gain a basic understanding of baleganjur, I will explore the main components in a composition. I have deconstructed the typical framework of a piece and isolated each feature to again highlight the interplay of asymmetry within symmetrical cycles.

The musical structure in gamelan baleganjur still adheres to recurring cycles of demarcated sonic checkpoints. There have been arguments recently about calling these structures cycles as it implies tracing the same melodies as previously played. Instead, ethnomusicologist Andy McGraw has suggested that these recurring melodies closely model helixes. In short, the idea is that each repetition involves more elements than just a recurring cycle. Each cycle differs from the previous in timbre, feel, and overall temporality. For the purposes of this thesis, I am going to continue discussing structures as cycles just for consistency. These cycles are marked by the *gong ageng* and *kempul* that are played to delineate the subdivisions in the form, which are typically called *gilak* or sometimes *gegilak*. The primary markers are played by the gong ageng alongside the kempul and are generally multiples or denominations of eight beats before repeating. The gong ageng is played on beats four and eight where the kempul fills out the last half of the cycle and plays on beats five and seven. One instrument specific to gamelan baleganjur is the *bende*, found in the gong family. The rhythmic ostinato of the bende is only played in baleganjur and fills in the beats as heavy, syncopated accents. As the primary structural foundation to the music, the gong family is the most important in

propelling the cohesion of the piece. “In Balinese music it is important to hear the phrasing of the melody as leading *toward* the final note” (Gold 2005: 57). Being able to “feel” the emptiness of a final note is a true component to being able to play baleganjur effectively. The concept of silence on the final note provides a desire for sonic closure, which gives the illusion of an endless cycle. This awareness of space is important not only musically but how Balinese people interact with one another: people fill in each others’ missing attributes to provide communal cohesion.

Kotekan, the process of interlocking rhythmic phrasings, is pushed to an extreme in gamelan baleganjur, but feeling the darkness or emptiness requires an understanding of the piece as a whole. In my experiences teaching baleganjur, this has been one of the many challenges; because students are generally afforded only a couple hours a week, I have to succumb to playing simplified rhythms that only contribute groove. It is true that, as practitioners become more sensitive to the patterns, they are able to figure out interlocking melodies faster. The challenge is still to figure out when not to play while having the expectancy of a sound to inhabit the space. It is also true of sonic and musical cues that emanate from the drum players.

The *kendang* player or drummer still functions as conductor just as in other kinds of Balinese gamelan, but in a way that is more synchronous with the rest of the ensemble. This means that as opposed to just playing motivic signals telling the rest of the ensemble to change patterns, kendang players join in playing the exact rhythms. People find this in typical drum set playing as cymbals and pass drums typically play together. One main difference in performance is that their rhythmic structure correlates more with the intricacies of the *ceng-ceng* section. This combination of skin drums with cymbals

clanging distinguishes the asymmetrical sub-divisions of the rhythms from the symmetrical structure of the gilak pattern. This idea is similar to the groove-based math-metal discussed earlier.

Even though hybridity in music is thought of as combining two or more genres, new music in Bali still adheres to the parameters of gamelan conventions. The creations of new gamelan compositions continue to incorporate conventional interlocking patterns and structural forms. Even though there has been a movement toward *musik kontenporer* (contemporary music) that re-defines gamelan aesthetics, the performances are largely experimental and in the context of entertainment rather than ceremonious functionality. In Indonesia, kreasi baru and musik kontemporer are completely different categories. "*Kreasi baru* may have close ties to a popular traditional art form, and thus would be more readily accepted by the general public" (Heimarck 2003: 161). This does not exclude the creation of new compositions but the instrumentation or techniques may be familiar ones. There is a sense of comfort even if there are additions to the musical norms.

3.2.2 Confusing the Spirits

The island of Bali has no shortage of prayer and spiritual projections. Often called "Pulau seribu pura" or island of one thousand temples, ritual ceremony occurs daily. When Balinese people refer to evil spirits, it is generally in reference to notions of negative energy. Although there is no real translatable word in Balinese that denotes "evil" spirit, there is a strong acknowledgement of its presence by Balinese people. Frequently appearing in *agama Hindu-dharma* mythology, images of demons and multi-

faced kings project into a system within Balinese people that conforms to ideas of balance. These entities have very particular travel patterns, as Balinese people believe that they are only able to move in straight paths. One testament to this is the implementation of a physical barrier just past the gates of someone's home. This is typically seen as an entrance of some sort and then, almost immediately, a wall erected to stop these spirits from entering. "In two of the pitra yadnya, the mortuary rituals *ngaben* (cremation) and *memukur* (purification of the soul), baleganjur music serves at several levels to assist deceased human souls in their afterlife journeys. The exorcistic bhuta yadnya rituals *mecaru* and *ngerupuk* employ the forceful sound and volume of beleganjur to frighten and ward off evil spirits (bhutas)" (Bakan 1999: 69).

Although rarely discussed within baleganjur compositions, the use of the music in ceremonies intended to confuse or ward evil spirits causes the musical compositions to adhere to similar processes of asymmetry. The music itself requires such precision because of the jagged rhythmic and melodic structures that it is easy to wonder if it is congruent to the idea of misleading evil spirits. Prominent within the embellishing instruments (ceng-ceng, reyong), the melodies and rhythmic motifs move far beyond metric modulation within the confines of the continuous gilak cycle. At first listen, or if unfamiliar with the patterns, audience members may seem disoriented hearing the melodic arpeggiations.

Ceremonies in Bali will always take precedence over any other societal functions. This relates to the idea of *rame* or crowded/noisy, in which traffic on roads will be halted or airports will be shut down. Congesting the streets with baleganjur and procession parallels the practice of making evil spirits move away from the ceremony. At times, this

proves to be inconvenient for tourists and foreigners visiting Bali but forces them to embrace the chaos. “In the all-important mortuary rituals *ngaben* (cremation) and *memukur* (post-cremation purification), processional beleganjur music is indispensable; from grand temple festivals *(odalan)* to exorcistic rites *(mecaru)* and majestic ceremonies in honor of the gods and deified ancestors *(melis)*, the functional presence of baleganjur sound is of crucial importance” (Bakan 1999: 41). The processional includes very strenuous travels partly on paved roads as well as in rice fields and jungles. Navigating through this terrain is difficult as it is without having to carry large gongs and performing music that requires rhythmic dexterity. I mention this briefly to bring back the fact that Niskala performs shirtless in Manchester, England, an area of the world that is cold and gloomy a majority of the year.

Villages in Bali are composed of houses at very close quarters. A processional blaring down the road may seem to be disconcerting and possibly annoying. For Balinese people, it becomes a sign of comfort. While the sound of baleganjur is of loud, clanging bronze instruments, knowing that its intention is to rid the air of evil spirits calms Balinese people. Much of the time, this has no real relevance since people are rarely in their homes during these events; instead, they are participating in communal efforts.

All in all, math-metal and gamelan baleganjur differ greatly in culture and intention. Both these musics include aspects that clearly define a different scope of praxis. As I have already discussed in the origins of sub-communities and sub-genres, the juxtaposition of ideas creates a magnetic attraction to one another. They are two opposing entities that find much shared artistic space and thus contribute to a collaborative

weaving of music. Niskala is just beginning to understand these parallels and crossovers in their exploration of hybrid music.

Chapter IV: Analyzing Niskala's Extended Play Album, *Panak*

In Balinese, the word *panak* means child or offspring and is a fitting metaphor for Niskala's first extended play album. The album consists of three tracks, released on bandcamp.com on June 13, 2014: "Kekawa," "Sarebi," "Kelem." As mentioned above, I will not analyze these pieces in a linear fashion, as conventional analysis would dictate. Instead, I break each musical motif into rhythmic cells for the purposes of isolating each *kotek* (interlocking) pattern, melodic micro-tonality, and motivic interplay between sections of the pieces. A cell in biological terms is defined as the smallest structural and functional unit of an organism, typically microscopic and consisting of cytoplasm and a nucleus enclosed in a membrane. In musical terms, I use the idea of a cell to denote the gestures and techniques that are responsible for the identity of the composition. Each of the pieces in this album has unique characteristics that exemplify Balinese gamelan aesthetics and techniques. These components, implanted into a heavy metal timbre, create complexity involving both math-metal and Balinese gamelan musical formulas.

Balinese gamelan pieces typically reflect the titles given to them. Each of the tunes highlighted here will include a translation of the name and what Luke Geaney was trying to accomplish throughout each piece. These translations are what Geaney figured them to be in his research of Balinese text and so I use his understanding rather than what I know them to be. By doing so, the pieces stay associated with Niskala's agency in creating the music. This is also a way to imagine the construction of these organismic pieces and how their cells come together. I will also include the primary pentatonic mode that each tune is in. The first two pieces derive from pelog scales found in gamelan *gong kebyar*, and the third finds roots in math-metal chord structures.

Apart from looking at the cells of each piece, I will discuss a stylistic factor deriving from either math-metal or Balinese gamelan. I refer to the tracks denoting time to highlight the spatiality of musical environment. This way, the prominent features are emphasized in isolation and more conducive to each musical stylization. Thus, the figures below highlight interlocking rhythms primarily in regards to the percussion instruments. The other components will be analyzed via text to paint the *rasa* or feeling, of the cells.

Figure 4. Cover art for Niskala's extended play album, *Panak*

4.1 "Kekawa"

Primary pentatonic mode: C-F-E-G-B

Focal stylistic component: Vocal Improvisation

Translation: The Balinese word "Kekawa" means spider or arachnid.

The first cell in "Kekawa" establishes a melodic ostinato with vocalizations interruped by loud spurts of musical outbursts: all of the instruments come in playing the

same rhythmic pattern to create a big sound. Figures 4.1a and 4.1b are the foundations to creating a musical cell. I have isolated the interlocking patterns for the drums and the rhythmic interjections of the rest of the instruments (ceng-ceng, electric guitar, bass, vocals). In the context of conventional rock instrumentation, there would be only one drummer playing both these rhythms simultaneously. Niskala divides the drum patterns to interlock, which make for a push-and-pull phenomena regarding timing.

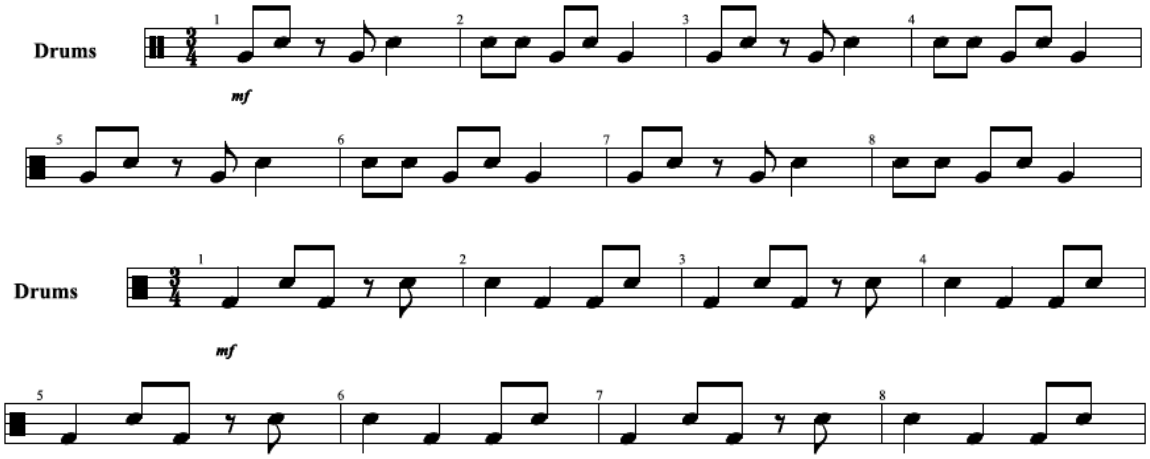

Figure 4.1a The kotekan pattern between drums, “Kekawa”(first cell)

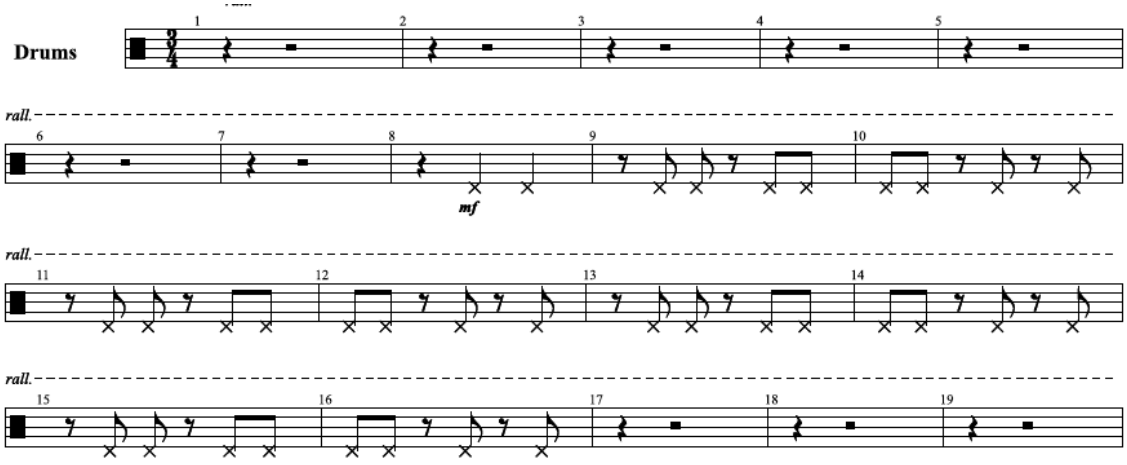

Figure 4.1b Rhythmic outbursts of guitar, cen-ceng, and vocals

This cell in particular functions as an homage to Balinese text, specifically *kidungan* (Balinese religious chanting). As explained above, Niskala performs vocals in an improvisational manner, rendering the use of lyricism largely textural. The Kawi language used in the Balinese literary tradition derives from onomatopoeic constructions. In Bali, Kawi is considered archaic which means a lot of the new generation does not understand it. The language is reserved for priests and dalang, or storytellers. It seems appropriate that the vocals in Niskala mimic the timbres in math-metal as the vocals in metal music generally materialize as growls or screams complementing the intensity of electric distortion. Niskala's use of lyrical improvisation tries to imitate the intention of Kawi for Balinese commoners: Niskala's audience are not coherent of the meaning behind vocables just as young Balinese people do not speak Kawi.

Within this cell, the guitars play a triplet ostinato accenting a cycle of the pitches G-F-E primarily on the second and fourth 16th notes in a 4/4 bar; the beginning of the pattern comes back every 3 measures. This creates a sensation of rhythmic ambiguity and keeps the composition moving in a cyclical fashion. Rhythmically asymmetrical structures super-imposed on a symmetrical foundation are stylistic in math-metal. The way rhythms modulate over bar lines is a common technique that plays around a pulse. That is not seen much in baleganjur as the rhythms in this context tend to be erratic and sporadic.

Although the language is somewhat improvised, the rhythmic relationship of vocalization to instrumentation is unique. Each outburst of intensity is rhythmically synchronous and requires mental dexterity for both the performer and listener, to combine the textural, linguistic, and rhythmic components of the cell. In this piece,

Niskala understands the musical components needed to transmit the idea of ambiguity. The kotek provides foundation while the lyrical improvisation allows the vocalist to weave in and out of melodic structure. Each performance can be different regarding lyricism but the effect will be similar due to the audiences' lack of knowledge for text.

4.2 "Sarebi"

Primary pentatonic mode: A-Bb-C-E-F

Focal stylistic component: "Ginneman" (Gamelan)

Title Translation: As an adjective, sarebi means arousing fear, dangerous, or uncanny (a place). As a noun, serebi means a secret grudge or smouldering unrest.

"Sarebi" is the only piece in the album to utilize the Balinese *ginneman* and *suling.* A suling is a bamboo flute used to embellish the melody in a gamelan piece. A suling performer will play with much vibrato and trills, as it is never ideal to play with long, straight notes, and has personal agency in stretching time within a piece. It is most prominent during the *ginneman*. A ginneman can be defined as the free rhythm/free flow section of a piece. Not all gamelan pieces include a ginneman and not all instruments will partake. Typically, a *gender* metallophone or *trompong* will lead the melody accented by the larger *jegog* and *jublag* instruments. Niskala uses this as an introduction in "Sarebi."

The piece begins with a melody played by the suling player as a solo instrumentalist. Differing from Balinese suling technique, the notes here are not played with trills or vibrato but rather as straight tones. From about 0:10-0:12, the suling slides up rapidly in pitch, ending with a piercing screech. This is uncharacteristic of Balinese suling playing

and would not occur in traditional repertoire. Suling players traditionally try to imitate the various musical vibrations of cicadas, which are an important component of Bali's sonic ecology. Nonetheless, the texture in this song complements the cells that follow.

As the suling player concludes, the ginneman morphs into a richer texture and the rest of the band plays a similar melody. It seems to complement the preceding cell and brings the piece into the realm of heavy metal. The guitars and ceng-ceng strike rhythmic accents on large chords, mimicking a *jegogan* in its role within a ginneman. Drums compliment the large amount of space with improvised and textural playing.

4.3 "Kelem"

Primary notes used: C#-E-D#-G#

Focal stylistic component: "Ombak" (Gamelan)

Title Translation: The Balinese word "kelem" means to sink, go under, or drown.

In terms of techniques transferred from gamelan to math-metal, the most significant idea used is that of interlocking patterns called *kotekan.* "Kelem" is the epitome of developing these sets of rhythms into a piece of coherent music. Individually and isolated, kotek patterns contribute motoric syncopated motifs that are vital to the unfolding of ambitious melodies. Finding the rhythmic and tonal center becomes ambiguous, which is the intention. The song begins with one electric guitar player establishing one half of an ostinato that sets the precedent for the piece. The kempli and then a drummer join, beginning with a crescendo, to create a foundation. The last to join are the ceng-ceng and vocals playing accents within spaces and floating lyricism,

respectively. Not only does “Kelem” build on rhythmic structures through kotekan but it is the most representative of math-metal compositions as well.

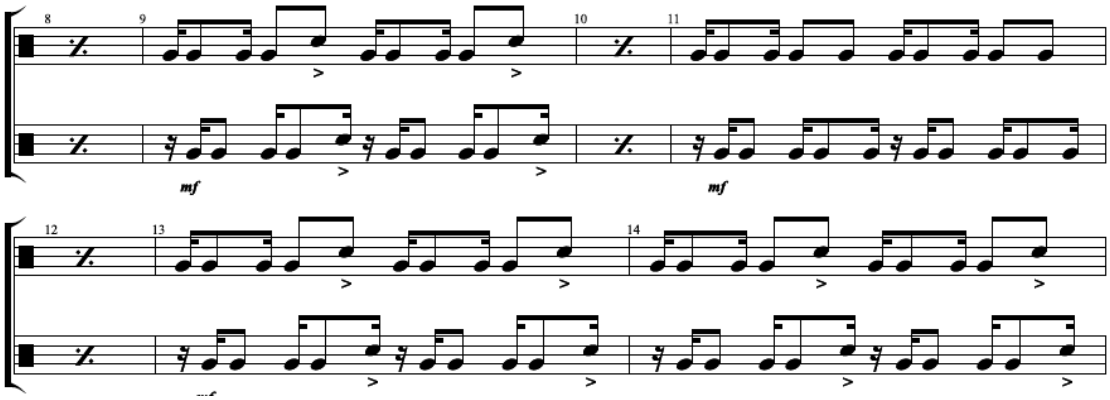

Figure 4.3 The kotek pattern of both drums, “Kelem”

Near the conclusion of the piece, the cell that is built up is congruent to “epic” finales in math-metal tunes. At about 2:30, the instrumentation breaks into dispersed and sporadic interjections. This is commonly found in math-metal as an illusion of rhythmic ambiguity. This leads into a call and response between guitars, drums, and ceng-ceng that finalizes with a vocal growl into the last cell of the piece. While the cells continue to layer and clump, “Kelem” builds on itself and cleverly isolates unfamiliar hocketed rhythms. Listeners are then able to extrapolate techniques without needing to be sensitive to the rhythmic links.

With these rhythms, Niskala creates highly dissonant chords. This seems to be a fundamental crossover between gamelan and math-metal as they play with the idea of acoustic beats. *Ombak* in Balinese means waves, usually referring to a body of water such as the ocean. The term is also used to describe the tuning system of gamelan instruments.

Each instrument is paired and tuned slightly off of the other so that, when struck together, they create a phenomenon of pulsating beats. Dissonant guitar chords create a similar phenomenon but the intervals between notes are slightly larger. Whether Luke Geaney chose to imitate the paired tuning of gamelan or just using combination of notes he sees as interesting, the timbral components creates similar physicality.

Conclusion

Niskala produces a fresh integration of traditional arts as they continue to establish and extend their rendition of a *sanggar*. As metaphor and praxis, the term *niskala* idealizes the production of a musical hybridity that combines the foundational techniques practiced by gamelan and math-metal. This thesis discussed musico-physiological kinesis, the emergence of sub-communities, creative cognitive processes, and the bonding of ethnographic relationships. I have defined key terms in regards to their function in musical hybridity and extracted ideologies as performance practice. While the foundation underlying my thesis includes the relationship between asymmetry and symmetry, the overall discussion centered on the discovery of beauty in darkness through comedic juxtaposition.

While gamelan baleganjur is intended to ward off evil spirits and heavy metal tends to promote dark ideas, the juxtaposition within Niskala's hybridity characterizes their intention in making this music. They embody a culture that not only extends a community located in Bali to England, but also describes a natural practice within the metal genre. The sonic world they choose to portray emerges from their interpretation of musico-physiological kinesis, which makes their pieces transcend organismic functions. This praxis allows Niskala to provide a unique hybridization within their metal community in Manchester. It makes them an exclusive event to witness. In particular, Niskala's musical interest informs artistic practice but also shows the greater gamelan community a new integration of cyclical research. This is exemplified through Luke Geaney's studies with I Made Lasmawan (Sanggar Manik Galih) and in turn, my research of Niskala.

Neriko Doerr's concept of "learning through laughter" has informed this study in association to dark culture. The ideological juxtaposition that Niskala harnesses attracts dark entities to find cohesion of a community. This is the common thread between math-metal and baleganjur: metal uses dark culture in its livelihood and baleganjur first attracts darkness to lead it away from ceremony. It also shows the greater gamelan community the dichotomy between music and Balinese way of life. So much of the relationship between student and teacher is contingent upon malleability of learning. Niskala provides discussion of how people perceive hybridized art as potential criticism of emerging practices.

By analyzing Niskala's extended play album *Panak*, I extracted the components that parallel their sonic palette with the emergence of a sub-community. The "cells" that highlight the techniques used in math-metal and gamelan baleganjur also revealed the philosophy embodied by the term *niskala*. Through fieldwork and virtual ethnography, Niskala's origins were traced and contextualized within the larger transnational community. In the hope of dismissing any negative biases toward umbrella terms describing genre, this thesis suggests rich value in discovering the emergence of sub-communities and sub-genres through musical praxis.

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